MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

NOAA
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
NORTHEAST REGION
HABITAT CONSERVATION DIVISION

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GLOUCESTER, MA OFFICE, ONE BLACKBURN DRIVE, GLOUCESTER, MA 01930

COASTAL DEVELOPMENT ADJACENT TO EELGRASS BEDS A GROWING CONCERN

Of the 20 projects reviewed in January during the Maine joint permit processing through the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), 16 were for docks and piers. Many of these structures were in the Harpswell area. Equally concerning is that nearly half of these projects were either within or adjacent to mapped eelgrass beds. Due to the winter season, the timing for ground-truthing the state eelgrass maps could not be worse. Even if a site survey conducted during the growing season indicates no eelgrass in the project footprint, direct and indirect impacts on the eelgrass bed may result from project completion. Eelgrass beds can shift, grow, or shrink seasonally. A pier permitted one season with site information indicating no direct eelgrass impacts may actually encroach on eelgrass habitat. This is a greater concern with associated floats. Resting on the water surface, floats generally block out more light from eelgrass than a pier which may be several feet above the mean low water line. Additional impacts are associated with the use of docks and piers. Without sufficient water at all tides, eelgrass may be damaged by boats and engine propellers, discarded debris, and incidental discharge/leaks of fuels and oils. The environmental review process through the ACOE is geared to evaluating direct impacts of a proposed structure on resources present at the time of review. Some flexibility is provided for resource surveys, but the overall time frame is limited. Potential habitat and secondary impacts are rarely taken into consideration. **(Sean.McDermott@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9113)**

SWANSEA DESALINATION PROJECT

In January staff from the Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) met with the Swansea Water District and representatives from Massachusetts state agencies to discuss the proposed construction of a desalination facility along the Palmer River in Swansea, MA. The project involves the withdrawal of approximately 4.3 million gallons of water per day (mgd), desalination of water using reverse osmosis, and the release of approximately 1.3 mgd of brine concentrate back into the Palmer River. HCD has requested information regarding fishery resources within the area, specifications of the intake structure, information regarding the concentrated brine discharge, and the potential for impacts on existing salt marsh resources. This project is currently in the review process within the state of Massachusetts and an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will be prepared. HCD will be requiring the preparation of

an expanded Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) assessment for this project.
(Christopher.Boelke@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9131)

AMESBURY TIDAL PROJECT
HCD met with representatives from Verdant Power to discuss plans to install turbines within the Merrimack River as part of a demonstration project. This demonstration project would install six helical turbines within the river to gather information regarding currents, efficiency, and feasibility of tidal power in the area. This project is scheduled to occur during the summer of 2004. HCD will be consulting with the applicant to develop a monitoring program that will identify and address adverse impacts on fishery resources within the river.
(Christopher.Boelke@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9131)

BUCKS HARBOR ANCHORAGE EXPANSION PROJECT
The proposed anchorage expansion in Bucks Harbor (near Machias, ME) was discussed during a pre-application coordination meeting and site visit with Maine ACOE. The project proposal included 25,000 cubic yards of dredge for the expansion of the anchorage and 50,000 cubic yards of dredge for maintenance of the existing channel and anchorage. The original proposal also asked for a short extension of the channel into the inner harbor to facilitate boat launching from a nearby beach, but would require intertidal dredging. Despite the arctic weather conditions during the site visit (-30 degrees), eelgrass and mussel beds were observed in this intertidal area. Suggested alterations to the project included the elimination or limitation of the channel extension, encouraging the use of an alternate beach for boat launching, a time of year window, and further resource surveys of the project area. **(Marcy.Scott@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9108)**

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MEADOWLANDS INTERAGENCY MITIGATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MIMAC)
Only one pre-application meeting was held during the monthly meeting of the MIMAC. BNE Associates presented a plan to construct a residential apartment complex on the north side of Berrys Creek Canal. Approximately 0.9 acres of tidal emergent wetlands would be filled for the project. On-site wetlands enhancement was proposed as compensatory mitigation. The site is 42 acres in size, 38 of which are wetlands. In addition to the required demonstration of avoidance and minimization of impacts, it was suggested that off-site mitigation may be ecologically preferable due to the serious contamination issues around Berrys Creek Canal. The group also discussed the Indicator Value Assessment Methodology (IVA) for evaluating wetlands functions. Since the group has several new members and because the IVA methodology had not been used in a while, it was a good refresher. The IVA is a modified version of the Wetlands Evaluation Technique (WET). The IVA was developed as part of the now-defunct Special Area Management Plan for the Meadowlands and it has been revised to provide a better evaluation of fish and wildlife functions. Other versions of the IVA are in use in Washington state. The MIMAC is planning to do a field exercise of the IVA this spring. **(Karen.Greene@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3023)**

PASSAIC RIVER NATURAL RESOURCE DAMAGE ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP

HCD staff attended an interagency workshop organized by NOAA's Damage Assessment and Restoration Program. The program is evaluating the potential for pursuing a damage assessment claim related to the contamination of the Passaic River, Newark Bay and the surrounding waterways, and the increased costs of disposing of the contaminated sediments. **(Karen.Greene@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3023)**

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OPEN WATER DISPOSAL OPTIONS EYED FOR SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND

The NEPA documentation of the assessment of the possibility for establishing an open water dredged material disposal site in the area between Cape Cod and the Connecticut/Rhode Island border is being finalized by representatives of the New England District, ACOE and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region I. Using the guidance provided within the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act, the agencies have gone to great lengths to utilize local knowledge of the resources within an area determined to be the Zone of Siting Feasibility (ZSF). Using the outreach and resource identification skills of the University of Rhode Island Marine Science's Coastal Institute, the federal team was able to enlist the assistance and cooperation of representatives of most of the region's stakeholders. During evening dialogue sessions, the Coastal Institute was able to facilitate the exchange of a great deal of information on dredging and the resources found within the ZSF. As a result, the documentation of those resources and the use patterns of the stakeholders have been melded to create an Environmental Impact Statement that provides a comprehensive assessment of the nature and consequences of siting one or more dredged material disposal sites in the area. The effort breaks a 30 year old logjam of conflicting and competing interests that had stopped four prior efforts to identify the presence of any suitable open water disposal sites in the region. If there is a site that can be designated in the region it would afford resource managers the opportunity to carefully craft a Dredged Material Management and Monitoring Plan. **(Michael.Ludwig@noaa.gov , 203/ 882-6504)**

RIVERSIDE SOUTH ENTERS PHASE III REVIEW

Hudson River Waterfront Associates LP have filed a joint application for Department of the Army authorization to conduct the construction of Phase III of Riverside Park South. The affected parcel lies on the west side of Manhattan between West 65th and West 62nd Streets. Phase I construction was completed in 2001. As part of Phase II, the park was being extended southward and was scheduled to be completed in 2003. The proposed Phase III activities include demolition and removal of concrete walls, timber pile-supported platforms, and timber cribs. New shoreline stabilization, a pedestrian walkway, and overlooks are also proposed. Interagency coordination will be undertaken for this proposal in the coming months. **(Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-7504)**

DRAFT GENERIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT PREPARED FOR WORLD TRADE CENTER MEMORIAL AND REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

Staff at the Milford Field Office have received a draft generic environmental impact statement (DGEIS) that evaluates the purpose, need, benefits, and environmental impacts of activities under consideration for the World Trade Center Redevelopment and Memorial. The proposed

action entails construction and operation of program elements that would affect the coastal zone. Tentatively, our review will focus primarily on the potential impacts on aquatic biota and habitats that would accrue in conjunction with cooling water withdrawals and associated thermal effluents. The DGEIS states that, under certain conditions, such water withdrawals may result in significant adverse impacts on lower Hudson River species. Staff will be completing their review and coordinating with some of our state and federal counterparts on this matter and expect to provide comments on the DGEIS by the end of February 2004.
(Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-7504)

COLD WEATHER SHUTS DOWN MANY DREDGING PROJECTS
Dredging in the winter of 2004 is proving to be a serious problem as the result of the harsh and persistent weather that has frozen many of our regional harbors and created significant ice damage to structures. Although we have come to routinely invoke an operation window for dredged material handling that closes for winter flounder on the first of February, in many cases, and regardless of the size of the equipment being employed, shutdown occurred in most projects in Connecticut and Rhode Island by late January. Although we had a similar winter with regard to precipitation in '03, this winter is shaping up to be different due to the intensity and persistence of the cold. It appears that winter flounder spawning in the southern portion of the range from mid through western Long Island into the coastal waters of New York Harbor experienced a virtual failure of any reproduction by the winter flounder. However, spawning assessments in Rhode Island, particularly in Narragansett Bay, have shown that there was not only successful spawning but some significance to the amount of survival.
(Michael.Ludwig@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6504)

BREWER YACHT YARD AT GLEN COVE
Staff completed coordination with the New York District, ACOE on the subject maintenance dredging project on the north shore of Long Island, New York. The project entails the extraction of accumulated material from two discrete cells in an existing boat basin with subsequent placement at the Central Long Island Sound Disposal Site. The final project conditions include an exclusionary window to protect EFH and other resources of concern, and a staged dredging plan that ensures portions of the material is suitably confined at the disposal site.
(Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-7504)

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT COMPLETED FOR GERRITSON CREEK ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROJECT
The New York District, ACOE has submitted a draft environmental assessment (EA) for the Gerritson Creek Ecosystem Restoration Project. The project goal is to restore habitats impacted by past filling activities associated with the Jamaica Bay Federal Navigation Project. In sum, the proposal is intended to improve habitat diversity to support avian and wildlife uses**.** Under this proposal, approximately 20.5 acres of intertidal salt marsh and 15 acres of coastal/maritime grassland would be restored. Our review of the EA is ongoing. Written comments to the New York District are in preparation. **(Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-7504)**

FIELD STUDY UNDERWAY CONCERNING DREDGING IMPACTS ON WINTER

FLOUNDER SPAWNING
For the second year of the Providence River Federal Navigation Channel maintenance dredging effort, the cooperative research team comprised of URI, state and federal representatives is in the process of collecting winter flounder spawning products to undertake the first field study of the impacts of suspended sediment on the species. As a means of advancing our understanding and the shaping of seasonal constraints on dredging, the team will expose the early life stages of the flounder to plumes of sediment at various distance from the operating dredge in order to assess and characterize the tolerance of the species in field conditions. **(Michael.Ludwig@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6504)**

MARINE BORER PROTECTION UNDER CONSIDERATION FOR FDR DRIVE
The New York City Department of Transportation (Bridges Division) is developing a plan to repair and protect existing underwater timber structural elements of relieving platforms that directly or indirectly support the FDR Drive along the East River in New York City. The repair activities are proposed to include: pile barrier wrapping, concrete encasement, timber pile posting, lightweight concrete fill, pile cap encapsulation, timber wale replacement, bracing replacement, timber removal, and installation of additional two-way bracing. The FDR Drive is a major north-south thoroughfare along Manhattan's eastern shoreline. Marine borer activity has affected the supporting structure. As such, the City of New York is planning to undertake the necessary repairs to preserve structural integrity and ensure public safety for those who use the FDR and its associated esplanade for transportation or recreational uses. Staff will continue coordinating with the New York District, ACOE and other involved agencies as the project plans are further defined. **(Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-7504)**

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INDIAN RIVER INLET TIDAL POWER PROJECT
Plans to construct a tidal power demonstration project in Indian River Inlet, Delaware, are advancing. Although application has not as yet been made for state or federal permits, project proponents anticipate developing a feasibility project using a single unit within the year, and proceeding to commercial production by 2006. Each unit consists of twin, reversible turbines that are 20 ft wide, 10 ft high, and 16 ft long; the final design is for 28 units (10.8 MW) to be phased in over a 4-5 year period.

Indian River Inlet provides the principal means of ingress and egress for migratory organisms using the Delaware Inland Bays, which collectively provide nursery and feeding habitat essential to dozens of species managed by the Magnuson Fishery Management Councils and/or Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Potential impacts of the generating units (e.g., vibration, entrainment, impingement, pressure changes) on living marine resources have not been addressed. The University of Delaware, College of Marine Studies, has been suggested to design studies to address biological impacts. Some data should soon be available from a similar, but nontidal, project that was recently permitted in the Yukon River, Alaska.
(Tim.Goodger@noaa.gov, 410/ 226-5606)
BALTIMORE HARBOR DREDGED MATERIAL MANAGEMENT

The Maryland legislature enacted the Dredged Material Management Act of 2001 that mandated the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) to develop within one year a plan with multiple options, both short- and long-term, to manage the 4.5 million cubic yards of dredged material generated annually from the harbor and its approach channels. An interagency management committee was organized by MPA to assist in developing and implementing the plan. MPA recently released the first annual report describing progress in plan implementation. Management options focus on maximizing capacity in existing sites through improved management techniques (e.g., crust management and dewatering), innovative reuse (e.g., mine reclamation, aggregate manufacture, agricultural application), and habitat restoration (e.g., island reclamation, brown field remediation). **(Tim.Goodger@noaa.gov, 410/ 226-5606)**

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY (TNC), REGIONAL SALTMARSH CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

TNC has an accomplished history in their conservation efforts in terrestrial ecosystems, but are only beginning to investigate methods to affect conservation within estuarine systems. To better address the conservation and management demands, TNC has formed teams comprised of biologists with backgrounds and broad experience in estuarine ecology and conservation. TNC hosted a series of workshops focusing on conserving and managing coastal wetlands from New England to Florida. Seven estuarine sites were selected and HCD staff was asked to participate in the group representing the Delaware Bayshores. The purpose of the workshops is to define the attributes and measurable indicators of a healthy saltmarsh system, to identify threats to its ecological integrity, and to develop strategies that can be taken by TNC and other stakeholders to address and alleviate those threats.

TNC is an influential organization with a large constituency dedicated to natural resource conservation. Participation in their exercise presents HCD with a unique opportunity to help guide wetland and estuarine conservation in a non-regulatory arena that will benefit not only the Delaware Basin, but other Atlantic coastal systems as well. **(Tim.Goodger@noaa.gov, 410/ 226-5606)**